

King County Office of Emergency Management Podcasts

Disasters: Are you ready?

EOC Operational Tips

- A frequent question I get when giving tours of our Regional communications and Emergency Coordination Center, located in Renton is, “How often do you activate?”
- The fact of the matter is that it is not that often. In the three years we have been in our new facility we have activated about five or six times, generally for smaller events.
- This is why doing disaster exercises is so important. The frequency of actual emergencies and disasters may be few and far between—depending on where you live.
- For King County we have had 20 Presidential Declared disasters in the last 41 years—so bad things do happen here and fairly frequently.
- I thought I’d provide a few operational tips I’ve gleaned over the years about working in and around Emergency Operations Centers (EOC) for over 35 years.
 - One of the big ones is to remember that the first report is almost always wrong. The news media recognize this because they are always dealing with the “First Report.”
 - So if you hear of an explosion, what is your first thought? Is it a gas line exploding or a car bomb? How big is the explosion? In the end, was it an explosion at all? I’ve had someone tell me the exact location of an incident because they observed it, but then it turned out that that wasn’t the location at all.
 - Just because it may not be correct doesn’t mean that you don’t react. When I am reporting on something that has just happened, I’ll use the “Initial reports indicate...”
 - So you then need to work to verify the information via other sources—and don’t be surprised if the “truth” changes.
 - My next tip for you is that you can only activate the EOC too late, not too early. There are those people who don’t want to go through the hassle of activating the EOC unnecessarily.

- But What I've found is that if you wait to be sure you need the EOC, the you can be way behind the eight ball on the event and it is difficult to catch up.
 - For the KCECC we have activation levels. Level 1 is just our OEM staff. This level is what will help you in doing the two items above. It helps us gather information to know what is going on, and it ensures we have people in place ready to respond when there is a request for resources or another issue—like evacuation
 - Also, if you wait to activate people settle in where they are and won't want to come to the EOC.
- I encourage you to use your EOC as often as possible. It will keep you staff sharper and you'll find the little problems before they become bigger ones a some later date.